



Issue 41 (2007)
October 5-9, 2007
Part 1: News Analysis

Following his full-fledged political début on the international stage at the UN General Assembly in New York two weeks ago, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov signaled this week that his administration is actively courting dialogue and cooperation on the regional level, as well. But he disappointed many who are measuring his actual achievements as a reformer by failing to use the annual mass pardon and release of thousands of inmates to ease political repression by freeing political prisoners, suggesting that reform in the political sphere is not on his administration's current agenda.

President Berdymukhamedov used his attendance at the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, October 5 to reaffirm Turkmenistan's limited "associative member" status, but signal willingness to participate more fully in regional coordination efforts related to drug-trafficking and terrorism, migration and legal norms. In a series of brief meetings with CIS leaders, including Russia's Vladimir Putin, President Berdymukhamedov signaled his country's greater willingness to participate more fully in regional coordination efforts to combat drug-trafficking and terrorism as well as coordinate migration and legal policies.

The highlight of his trip to Tajikistan was in fact his lengthier one-on-one meetings with President Emomali Rakhmon, who is a hopeful customer for discounted electricity supplied by Turkmenistan. Mindful of Turkmenistan's role in brokering peace talks between rebel groups and the Tajik government that brought an end to Tajikistan's civil war in 1997, Rakhmon has also been a backer of Ashgabat's new UN-sponsored Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia. The two presidents signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and also a number of separate agreements ranging from culture to the environment; President Berdymukhamedov noted that some 10,000 ethnic Tajiks live in Turkmenistan. After receiving a report on the operation of Tajikistan's bicameral parliament, the Turkmen leader spoke of his efforts to bring about further democratization in Turkmenistan through Constitutional reform and election to local and national representative bodies, thus opening up the topic of democracy for regional conversations between Central Asian states, not just one on the agenda of concerned visiting Western officials.

The European Union Foreign Policy and Security Envoy, Javier Solana, arrived in Ashgabat on October 8 as part of a three-country Central Asian tour. His meetings with President Berdymukhamedov, to discuss the Turkmen leader's trip to Brussels in early November, and with officials of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry and Natural Resources, illustrated the reinvigorated EU-Turkmen bilateral agenda of political engagement and European energy investment.

Turkmenistan's legally mandated annual prison release saw the release on October 2 of some 9,013 inmates – about 1,000 fewer than last year's under the ostensibly more authoritarian President Niyazov. Forum 18 News Service reported that four Jehovah's Witnesses who were imprisoned for conscientious objection to military service. Among those released were apparent victims of collective punishment for a relative's dissent or alleged criminal offense, and those not given due process: Dovlet Niyazdurdyev, nephew of opposition leader Sapar Yklymov; Aina and Aman Shikhmuradov, relatives of former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov; Geldy Kiyarizov, a local horse owner; and the mother and uncle of defector Murat Garabaev. .

But, disappointing even presidential backers, the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) stated that none of the prominent political prisoners involved in the alleged failed coup of November 2002, such as former foreign minister Boris Shikhmuradov, were included in the list. It added that some 5,000 of those released had served less than a year in prison and another roughly 2,500 had been sentenced only last year. This suggests that this year's mass pardon provided some humanitarian relief, but little release of more long-standing political grievances. TIHR noted that 1,370 of those released were women, and fully 60 were juveniles, and that a condition for release was admission of guilt.

This week the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the presidential Institute for Democracy and Human Rights convened a seminar of government officials and experts to discuss Turkmenistan's reporting to UN's treaty bodies. It is hoped that the improvement of information collection and open discussion of the country's widespread human rights violations will help deter abusive practices.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: Turkmenistan's annual prison amnesty released some 9,000 inmates, but reportedly only 4 prisoners of conscience and another 6 victims of collective punishment, disappointing even presidential supporters. President Berdymukhamedov met with the EU's Javier Solana to plan his fall trip to Brussels, and attended a CIS leaders' meeting in Tajikistan

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. President Berdymukhamedov Meets CIS Counterparts, Affirms Turkmenistan's Associated Status

Original title: Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov Holds Brief Talks with His Counterparts as Part of CIS Summit

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/06/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11220&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: At the CIS summit in Dushanbe on October 5, President Berdymukhamedov met briefly with other CIS presidents to discuss mutual cooperation on the margins of the meeting, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the State News Agency (TDH). The Turkmen leader discussed “essential issues of bilateral cooperation” with Russian President Vladimir Putin, although no details were provided.

At the summit, the presidents discussed some 20 issues including the concept of the CIS itself and cooperation in economic and humanitarian issues, with a particular focus on collective security, combatting crime and terrorism, and collaboration on migration and legal issues. President Berdymukhamedov confirmed that Turkmenistan will retain its status of “associated member” and “will continue taking an active part in CIS affairs”.

b. Turkmen President Meets with Tajik President

Original title: *Cooperation Produced by the Interests of Two Brotherly Peoples. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/04/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=071004c>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov completed a two-day visit to Tajikistan, where he took part in the CIS summit and met with Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon, the official Turkmen government website reported. This was the president's first state visit to Tajikistan. Turkmenistan “has played a special role” in bringing about peace in Tajikistan today, the government website commented. Berdymukhamedov had two one-on-one meetings with Rakhmon, and the two leaders also brought in staff to discuss draft bilateral agreements on the delivery of electricity to Tajikistan, as well as transportation, communications, the textile industry and agriculture.

The Turkmen leader emphasized that his country would provide stable delivery of petroleum products, including under the terms of a recently-signed 3-year contract. Berdymukhamedov also expressed interest in development of Tajikistan's aluminum industry. He commented favorably about regular scientific and cultural contacts, noting that 10,000 ethnic Tajiks reside in Turkmenistan.

President Rakhmon expressed his support for the UN-sponsored Center for Preventive Diplomacy to be opened in Ashgabat, emphasizing his gratitude for Turkmenistan's help in establishing peace in Tajikistan, and noted that Turkmenistan's neutrality is an important factor for stability in Central Asia.

After the meeting, the two countries signed a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation and a number of agreements outlining the basic principles for trade and economic cooperation, culture, education, protection of investments, agriculture and the environment. After hearing a report on Tajikistan's bicameral parliament, Berdymukhamedov noted that Turkmenistan's further democratization was a priority, and included Constitutional reform, the election of the members of the Gengesh and local representative bodies, and the role of the Halk Maslakhat, the highest representative body in Turkmenistan and the Mejlis, the national legislature, in the country's reforms.

c. EU Foreign Policy Envoy Visits Turkmenistan

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/08/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071008a>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov and EU Foreign Policy and Security Envoy Xavier Solana met in Ashgabat October 8 to discuss the Turkmen leader's early November trip to Brussels for talks with EU

however, was not published. TIHR's tally revealed a minor discrepancy with the TDH list, as TIHR's list contains two less persons.

About 1,200 people on the list are adults aged 24 and younger, with 60 persons below the age of 18. Ismat A. Abdullaev, for example, was born in 1990. The list includes 30 people older than 70 years old. There are over 1,370 females in the list. In this connection it should be noted, however, that there is only one female penal colony operating in Turkmenistan, located in the city of Dashoguz (DZ-K/8), and its official capacity is 700 inmates. Consequently, the number of female inmates released from imprisonment is roughly twice as high as can fit in the colony. Thus, it is quite obvious that many inmates still remain in custody in DZ-K/8 and were not released under pardon.

Despite the expectations cherished by many, the list of those pardoned excludes prisoners of conscience or those who are referred to as political prisoners. Former government officials, convicted in the Niyazov era also do not appear on the list.

Other data reveal that the great majority of those pardoned, i.e. over 5,000 people, were convicted this year. The beneficiaries of the pardon also include about 2,500 people sentenced to imprisonment in 2006. Based on this information, it can be assumed that this many people in Turkmenistan (with a population of about 4 million) are annually subjected to investigative procedures, as well as the extortion, abuse, threats and torture associated with them.

Since this action to release convicts is treated as a pardon, and not as an amnesty, we cannot find out the articles of the Criminal Code under which these persons were sentenced and, subsequently, it is unclear what crimes are committed most frequently in Turkmenistan. According to other sources, however, the majority of crimes are associated with drugs (drug possession, drug-trafficking, drug abuse, crimes associated with drug intoxication, or theft and robberies to get funds to purchase a drug dose).

According to the President of Turkmenistan, all 9,013 people are due to return to their homes early next week. We share the joy with them and their loved ones. At the same time, we do hope that the Turkmen authorities realize that the annual pardon campaigns are not a solution to the problem. In-depth comprehensive and nationwide state programs on combating crime are needed, including the solution of many social issues facing the country.

b. Human Rights Advocate Calls for End to Collective Punishment in Turkmenistan

Original title: On Relatives of “Enemies of the People” by Farid Tukhbatullin of the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR).

Translated by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Reprinted with permission from Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights

Source: *Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights*

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?02510434680000000000000011000000>

Everyone in Turkmenistan is interested to know whether Berdymukhamedov will release political prisoners, prisoners of conscience, former high-ranking government officials and participants in the failed coup against former president Saparmurat Niyazov in November 2002. The answer to this question is indeed important, as it demonstrates to what extent the current government is prepared to change the political system in Turkmenistan, and what the future of Turkmenistan will hold. Many people, including representatives of human rights organizations, are forgetting about other victims of the Turkmen regime -- the relatives and the associates of those convicted, and those forced to leave the country. The practice of collective punishment continues in Turkmenistan, whereby not only a person who has committed some offense in the eyes of the government's (is convicted by a court) but his entire family, relatives, and associates.

Most relatives of "traitors to the motherland," dissidents, opposition figures, human rights activists and other persons unfavorable to the regime are continuing to suffer a violation of their rights. They are deprived of the opportunity to work, study, or leave the country. Some of them are stripped of their homes and possessions, which are confiscated "for government use". There are even cases where relatives wind up in prisons, not due to crimes they have committed, but merely because they are relatives of persons out of favor with the regime.

It is premature to discuss whether the president will pardon this or that prominent prisoner. First, the authorities must renounce the practice of collective punishment, and not use it in the future. Relatives of

those persecuted must not feel as if they are guilty and not have their rights violated. As a minimum, they must have the opportunity to work and study. Berdymukhamedov gave an order to find work for those released under the decree on the pardon, and local bureaucrats, of course, will try to fulfill the president's order. But if the Turkmen leadership would give an order to law-enforcement agencies to cease putting pressure on the relatives and associates of person out of favor with the regime, and not prevent them from finding a job or arranging school for their children, this could be appreciated as a real step toward improving the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

c. New National Security and Interior Ministers Appointed in Turkmenistan

Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: gundogar.org/10/08/07

Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?02250000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov decreed new appointments October 8, gundogar.org reported. Charymurad Amanov, the former deputy chairman of the State Service of Turkmenistan to Register Foreign Citizens, has been named Minister of National Security of Turkmenistan. In a separate decree, Orazgeldy Amanmuradov was appointed the Minister of Internal Affairs. Both officials are appointed for a trial period of six months.

The president dismissed the previous National Security Minister, Geldymukhamed Ashirmukhammedov, and Interior Minister, Khodzhamurad Annakurbanov and their first deputies. As gundogar.org learned from a source close to the Turkmen government, the two "power" ministers were fired as the result of a preliminary investigation undertaken by the Prosecutor General, and that a criminal case may be opened against the dismissed officials.

d. President Marks Memorial Day for 1948 Earthquake Victims

Original title: *President Berdymukhamedov Takes Part in Memorial Ceremonies on Day of Remembrance. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Official Turkmen government website/10/06/07.

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071006b>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov took part in a Day of Remembrance for the victims of the 1948 earthquake, one of the most tragic days in Turkmenistan's history, the official Turkmen government website reported. More than 170,000 people were killed 59 years ago on October 6, when an earthquake struck Ashgabat and environs, a tragedy that affected many families, including the president's own, as his grandfather was killed. Officials laid wreaths at the memorial complex with a sculpture of a mother holding up her child, symbolizing the city's determination to emerge from the destruction. The president spoke of his plans to further develop Ashgabat as a "regional peace-making center," drawing on modern urban design principles to make a cultural and business center known as "Ashgabat City".

A ceremony was also held in Kipchak, the home town of former president Saparmurat Niyazov, and in keeping with Muslim tradition during the fast of Ramadan, the event was conducted after sundown. Memorial prayer services were also held in all of Turkmenistan's cities and villages.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Turkmenistan to Purchase \$1.5 Million Internet Equipment from Russia

Original title: Ministry of Communications of Turkmenistan to Buy Russian Equipment to Develop Internet. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Official Turkmen government website/10/06/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071006a>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has signed a decree permitting the Turkmen Ministry of Communications, in compliance with the results of an international tender, to sign an agreement with TekhnoServ AS, a Russian company, to purchase equipment for the development, modernization, and expansion of a subscription network for the Internet, worth a total of US \$1,585,337.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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